2011 National Household Survey - Aboriginal Language Knowledge

On May 8, 2013, Statistics Canada released 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) data on Aboriginal Peoples, including the knowledge of Aboriginal languages. This document presents a profile of Aboriginal language knowledge in Canada.

Statistics Canada defines non-official language knowledge as "languages other than English or French, in which the respondent can conduct a conversation". Aboriginal languages fall into this category of non-official languages.

According to results of the 2011 NHS, there remain three Aboriginal languages with more than 20,000 total speakers. They are Cree with about 96,700; Inuktitut with nearly 37,000 and Ojibway with over 25,100 (although down by 22.5% from 2006). Also, the Innu/Montagnais, Oji-Cree and Dene (Denesuline branch, formerly known as Chipewyan) all have between 10,000 and 13,000 speakers.

Table 1. Total Number of People Who Reported Aboriginal Language Knowledge by Aboriginal Group, 1996 to 2006 Censuses and 2011 NHS

Aboriginal Language Knowledge by Group	*1996*	*2001*	*2006*	*2011*
Total Aboriginal Population[1] (All Ages)	233,900[2]	232,905[2]	252,045[2]	240,815[2]
Registered Indian Population[3]	183,790	182,135	201,060	188,105
Non-Status Indian Population[4]	6,110	5,555	4,275	4,795
Métis Population[5]	14,575	13,015	11,595	9,895
Inuit Population[6]	29,010	31,800	34,840	37,830
Non-Aboriginal Population[7]	4,730	4,540	6,240	4,305

Sources: Statistics Canada, 1996 to 2006 Censuses of Population and 2011 National Household Survey, Statistics Canada and AANDC tabulations.

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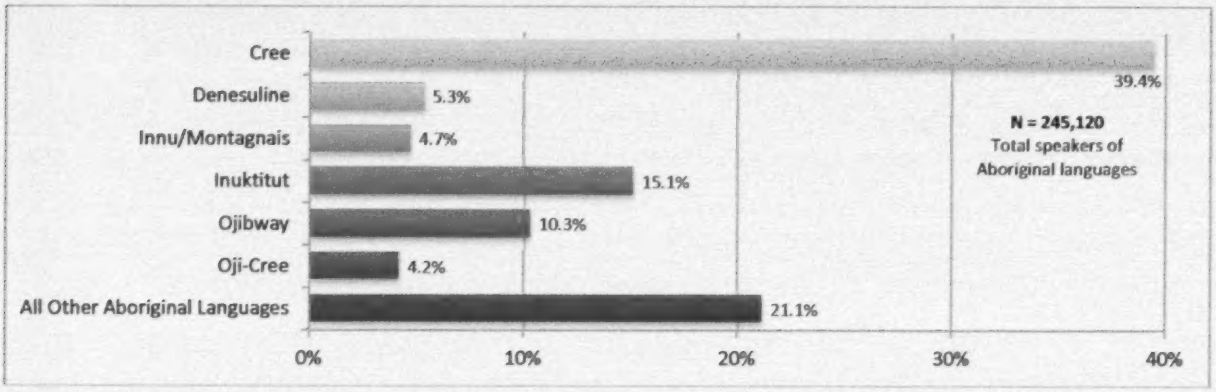
Figure 1. Distribution of Population with Knowledge of Aboriginal Languages (with ≥ 10,000 Speakers), 2011 NHS



Sources: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey, Statistics Canada and AANDC tabulations

Total Aboriginal Identity Population

-The total number of people who self-identified as Aboriginal was about 1,400,700 in 2011. This represents an increase of 19.4% from 1,172,800 in 2006. Over the 15 year period 1996 to 2011, the increase was 75.3% from 799,000.

-The number of Aboriginal people with knowledge of an Aboriginal language was 240,815 in 2011, a straight decrease of about 4.5% from 252,045 in 2006. Since 1996, however, the count increased by 3.0% from 233,900.

-Over the past 15 years, the proportion of the Aboriginal population with knowledge of an Aboriginal language has been decreasing steadily, from 29.3% in 1996 to 21.5% in 2006 to 17.2% in 2011. However, this decline may have been disproportionately influenced by gains in the number of people self-identifying as Aboriginal over time (i.e. ethnic mobility).

Registered Indian Population (i.e. Status Indians)

-According to results of the 2011 NHS, 697,510 individuals self-identified as being registered under the *Indian Act*. This represents an increase of 11.8% from 623,780 in 2006 and of 42.9% from 488,045 in 1996.

-The number of Status Indians with knowledge of an Aboriginal language experienced a decrease over the past five years going from 201,060 in 2006 to 188,105 in 2011 (-6.4%). However, similar to results of the overall Aboriginal identity population, the count has increased since 1996, from 183,790 to 188,105 (2.3%).

-In 2011, more than a quarter (27.0%) of the overall Registered Indian population could converse in an Aboriginal language. This proportion was down from 32.2% in 2006 and from 37.7% in 1996.

-Of the 188,105 Status Indians with knowledge of an Aboriginal language in 2011, 141,000 (75.0%) resided on-reserve. This proportion was down slightly from 76% in 2006, although part of this decrease may be attributed to how AANDC defined on-reserve communities in 2011 and/or to the usual change in community participation that occurs from one cycle to the next[8,9,10].

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-Of the Aboriginal languages spoken by Status Indians in 2011, the most common are Cree with about 86,000 speakers and Ojibway with 23,600 (down by 21.9% from 30,230 in 2006). Also exceeding 10,000 speakers each are Oji-Cree, Innu/Montagnais and Dene (Denesuline).

-In 2011, most Status Indians with knowledge of Cree resided in the prairies with 22,630 in Manitoba, 24,230 in Saskatchewan and 18,650 in Alberta. However, these respective counts were all down from 23,450, 26,240 and 18,995 in 2006.

-As for Status Indians with knowledge of Ojibway, the two provinces with the highest counts are Ontario with 11,585 (down from about 15,600 in 2006) and Manitoba with 9,530 (down from about 11,600 in 2006).

-Knowledge of an Aboriginal language was more prevalent in the older population. Amongst all Registered Indians under the age of 55, about a quarter (24.7%) could speak an Aboriginal language. For those living on-reserve, the proportion was 41.5%. Meanwhile, the proportions for those aged 55 years and older were significantly higher at 41.7% and 66.4%, respectively.

Non-Status Indians (i.e. First Nations, Non-Registered)

-In 2011, 213,900 people self-identified as Non-Status Indians. This represents a substantial increase of over 60% since 2006, which is partly due to a phenomenon known as ethnic mobility in which individuals change their reported identity over time. This group has experienced the largest gain over the past 15 years going from 86,595 in 1996 to the current 213,900 (147%).

-The number of Non-Status Indians indicating knowledge of an Aboriginal language experienced a gain between 2006 and 2011, increasing by 12.3% from 4,275 to 4,800. Previous to this, the count had been declining, from 6,110 in 1996 to 5,555 in 2001 to 4,275 in 2006. The large decrease of 1,280 individuals between 2001 and 2006 was attributable, in most part, to the fact that the Innu of Labrador were formally recognized as Status Indians in 2002.

-About 2.2% of Non-Status Indians could converse in an Aboriginal language in 2011. This proportion was down by one percentage point from 2006, and by nearly five percentage points from 7.1% in 1996.

-In 2011, the most common Aboriginal language knowledge amongst Non-Status Indians is Cree with 2,530 speakers, an increase of 42.1% from the 1,780 speakers observed in 2006. Previous to that, the count had been decreasing (2,675 in 1996 and 2,210 in 2001).

-In both 1996 and 2001, Montagnais-Naskapi represented the next most common knowledge amongst Non-Status Indians with counts of 1,300 and 1,370, respectively. In both years, just about 95% off all Non-Status Indians with knowledge of Montagnais-Naskapi were residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. In 2006, the Newfoundland and Labrador count dropped to only 65 speakers which is likely attributable to the fact that the Innu of Mushuau (Davis Inlet) and Sheshatshiu became formally recognized as Status Indians in November, 2002. Dene (Denesuline) is now the second most common Aboriginal language knowledge amongst Non-Status Indians with 685 speakers in 2011, 640 of whom resided in Saskatchewan.

-While nearly three-quarters of all Non-Status Indians lived in population centres[11] in 2011, only 1.0% of them could speak an Aboriginal language (compared to 2.0% in 2006). Of the 4,800 Non-Status Indians with Aboriginal language knowledge in 2011, 1,580 were living on-reserve (32.9%), 1,585 in rural[12] areas (33.0%), and 1,630 in population centres (34.0%).

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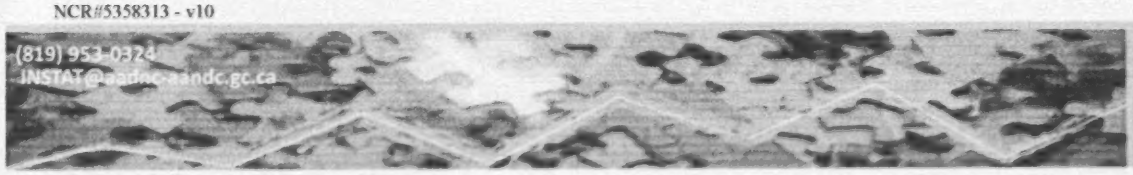

Inuit

-In 2011, 59,115 individuals self-identified as Inuit only; 10,000 more than in 2006 representing an increase of 20.4%. Since 1996, the Inuit only population has increased by nearly 50% (from 39,480).

-There is a continuing improvement in the number of Inuit with knowledge of an Aboriginal language. The 2011 NHS count of 37,830 represents increases of 8.6% from 34,840 in 2006 and of 30.4% from 29,010 in 1996.

-In terms of proportions, however, there is a continuing downward trend. In 2011, 64.0% of Inuit could converse in an Aboriginal language; down considerably from 70.9% in 2006 and from 73.5% in 1996.

-As expected, nearly the entire Aboriginal language knowledge by Inuit is specific to Inuit languages. In 2011, the number of Inuit with knowledge of an Inuit language increased to 37,600 (representing 99.4% of the overall number of Inuit who can converse in an Aboriginal language). This compares to 34,475 in 2006 (99.0%) and 28,960 in 1996 (99.8%).

-Of the 37,600 Inuit with knowledge of an Inuit language in 2011, 36,040 (or 95.9%) identified Inuktitut[13] as the specific language. As for other Inuit languages, 80.0% of the 675 speakers of Inuinnaqtun resided in Nunavut while 86.3% of the 620 speakers of Inuvialutkun lived in the Northwest Territories.

-The four provinces or territories with the largest counts of speakers of the Inuit languages are Nunavut, Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Northwest Territories. This result is consistent with the geographic boundaries of the corresponding Inuit Land Settlement Regions of Nunavut, Nunavik, Nunatsiavut and Inuvialuit.

Métis

-Influenced by the same ethnic mobility phenomenon as the Non-Status Indian population, the Métis population has experienced the second largest growth over the past 15 years. Between 1996 and 2006, the number of individuals who self-identified as Métis only nearly doubled going from 178,360 to 355,505. According to results of the NHS, there were 418,380 Métis people in 2011; an increase of 134.6% since 1996.

-The number of Métis reporting knowledge of an Aboriginal language has been declining steadily. The count of 9,895 in 2011 represents decreases of 14.7% from 11,600 in 2006 and of 32.1% from 14,575 in 1996.

-The steady decreases in language knowledge counts combined with sharp increases in the overall Métis only population lead to acutely declining proportions of Métis who can converse in an Aboriginal language. In 2011, only 2.4% of Métis individuals could speak an Aboriginal language; down from 3.3% in 2006 and from 8.2% in 1996.

-Amongst the 9,895 Métis with knowledge of an Aboriginal language in 2011, the most common is Cree with 6,375 speakers (down from 8,000 in 2006) followed by the Denesuline branch of the Dene with just over 2,000 speakers (up from 1,560 in 2006). Of the 6,375 Métis with knowledge of Cree, 5,240 (82.2%) lived in Saskatchewan and Alberta. Meanwhile, 1,910 of the 2,015 Denesuline speakers, or 94.8%, resided in Saskatchewan.

-For the first time, Michif (the traditional language of the Métis) was classified by Statistics Canada as a separate Aboriginal language in 2011. However, only 810 Métis indicated knowledge of this language. Of these, 83.3% resided in the three provinces of Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

-Of 9,460 Métis Aboriginal language speakers who did not live on-reserve in 2011, 61.9% resided in rural areas. This proportion is up from 58.6% observed in 2006.

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-Aboriginal language knowledge was more prevalent in the older population. Amongst all Métis under the age of 55, only 1.8% could speak an Aboriginal language. For those aged 55 years and older, the proportion was significantly higher at 5.0%. As for the Michif language in particular, of all Métis under the age of 55, only about 0.1% could speak it. For those aged 55 years and older, the proportion was 0.5%.

Non-Aboriginal

-In 2011, a total of 31,451,640 individuals in Canada reported having no Aboriginal Identity. This number has increased steadily by 4.6% from 30,068,240 people in 2006 and by 13.4% from 27,729,115 since 1996.

-The number of non-Aboriginal people with knowledge of an Aboriginal language decreased significantly from 6,240 in 2006 to 4,305 in 2011, a decline of 31%. Prior to 2006, however, the counts had been similar to that of 2011 with 4,540 in 2001 and 4,730 in 1996.

-Of the 4,305 non-Aboriginal individuals who reported they could speak an Aboriginal language in 2011 (representing 1.8% of the overall population who reported Aboriginal language knowledge), nearly half (47.4%) resided in Census Metropolitan Areas.

Notes:

1. The total Aboriginal population refers to the population that self-identified with one or more of the three Aboriginal identity groups (First Nations, Inuk, Métis), and/or indicated Registered or Treaty Indian Status, and/or indicated band membership.
2. Excluded from these counts are respondents who reported more than one Aboriginal identity, and those who reported being a member of a band with no Aboriginal identity and no Registered Indian status. However, individuals included under these two groups reporting Aboriginal language knowledge result in small numbers.
3. The Registered Indian population refers to the population that indicated Registered or Treaty Indian Status.
4. The Non-Status Indian population refers to the population that identified as First Nations (single response) and indicated NO Registered or Treaty Indian Status.
5. The Métis population refers to the population that identified as Métis (single response) and indicated NO Registered or Treaty Indian Status.
6. The Inuit population refers to the population that identified as Inuk (single response) and indicated NO Registered or Treaty Indian Status.
7. The non-Aboriginal population refers to the population that did not identify with any of the three Aboriginal identity groups (First Nations, Inuit, Métis), did not indicate Registered or Treaty Indian Status, and did not indicate band membership.
8. "On-reserve" includes legally defined Indian reserves, Indian settlements, other land types created by the ratification of Self-Government Agreements, and northern communities affiliated with First Nations. For more information, please refer to the *2011 National Household Survey Dictionary* (referenced below). On-reserve numbers do not adjust for the differences that could be attributed to the participation of different communities between censuses or to changes to the reserve geography definition.
9. In 2011, 36 Indian reserves and settlements did not participate or were incompletely enumerated in the NHS compared with 22, 30 and 77 in the 2006, 2001 and 1996 Censuses, respectively. Provincial breakdowns for incompletely enumerated reserves and settlements in 2011 are as follows: 7 in Quebec; 22 in Ontario; 3 in Manitoba; 2 in Saskatchewan; 1 in Alberta and 1 in British Columbia. Data for incompletely enumerated reserves and settlements are not available, and therefore, are excluded from On-reserve population counts.
10. It is important to note that there are a number of reserves with data quality issues (DQ reserves) in 2011. Statistics Canada defines DQ reserves as those having global non-response rates of at least 50% (25% in 2006, 2001 and 1996). Further analysis will be required in order to determine the magnitude and specific impacts.
11. Starting with the 2011 Census, the term 'population centre' replaces the term 'urban area'. A population centre has a population of at least 1,000 and a population density of 400 persons or more per square kilometre, based on the current census population count. In this analysis, however, the population of a population centre is limited to those living off-reserve.

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12. Areas outside of population centres are classified as rural areas. In this analysis, however, rural also excludes populations living on-reserve.
13. In both 1996 and 2001, Inuktitut was presented as an isolate in AANDC's Census tabulations received from Statistics Canada. In 2006, Statistics Canada divided Inuktitut into separate Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun components. Then in 2011, an 'Inuit languages' item was created that was subdivided into Inuktitut, Inuinnaqtun, Inuvialuktun and a 'not included elsewhere' components. For reasons of comparability to previous Census years, Inuktitut in 1996 and 2001 is taken to be the total of all Inuit languages.

Sources:

Statistics Canada, 2006, 2001 and 1996 Censuses of Population (20% sample data), AANDC tabulations.

Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey (NHS), AANDC and Statistics Canada day of release tabulations.

Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey, NHS Dictionary, Catalogue number 99-000-XWE.

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